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## NEWS

# Congress OKs money for new Soo lock

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**By Edward Hoogterp  
Lansing Bureau**

SAULT STE. MARIE -- Fifteen years after approving the idea of an additional lock to ease freighters through the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie, Congress is finally putting money into building the project.

Congress approved an appropriations bill Thursday that includes the first \$3 million in construction funding for what is expected to be a \$225 million project. It will take at least five years to complete.

A House-Senate Conference Committee had added the money to a multibillion-dollar appropriation for water and energy projects across the nation.

Construction could begin as soon as 2002, said U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee. The Great Lakes states will also help pay for construction. Michigan approved its \$14 million share in October.

The Soo Locks complex includes four separate locks. But three were built at least 50 years ago, and are too small to handle the modern 1,000-foot-long bulk carriers that keep steel mills supplied with ore from the iron ranges around Lake Superior.

"Lake Superior is where virtually all the iron ore comes from," said Glen Nekvasil, spokesman for the Lake Carriers Association, which represents United States vessels in the Great Lakes.

He said Great Lakes freighters also carry millions of tons of grain, coal and stone from Lake Superior to the industrial cities on the lower lakes.



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Shipping interests have argued for years that a second modern lock is needed to ensure that shipping of iron ore would continue even if sabotage or an accident were to disable the Poe Lock, which provides the only way for the largest ore carriers to move out of Lake Superior.

"The problem that we have, and the justification for the new lock, is that all of the 1,000-footers are constrained to the Poe Lock," said Scott Parker, deputy district engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit. "If something were to happen to that lock, we would lose the capacity of 70 percent of the U.S. fleet to move from the upper lakes to the lower lakes."

Congress authorized a new lock in 1986, but had not appropriated money for construction.

Together with the October approval of a new Coast Guard icebreaker, the appropriation for a new lock means the government is committed to spend some \$300 million for support of commercial shipping in the Great Lakes, even though the number of vessels and amount of cargo is less than it was 40 years ago.

The new icebreaker, scheduled for launch in late 2004, will replace the Mackinaw, a 290-foot workhorse that has been the main heavy icebreaker on the Great Lakes since 1944.

The new vessel, to be built for \$82 million in Marinette, Wis., will also be known as the Mackinaw. Like the current version, it will be based at Cheboygan in northern Lake Huron. Preliminary specifications call for a 240-foot vessel with the ability to move at a speed of 3 knots through water covered by 30 inches of solid ice.

The Soo Locks have been in operation since 1855, raising and lowering ships by 21 feet so they can move between Lake Superior and Lake Huron.

Two of the locks, Sabin and Davis, were built more than 80 years ago; MacArthur was completed in 1944 and Poe opened in 1968.

Of the four, only the Poe Lock, at 1,200 feet long and 110 feet wide, can accommodate the largest Great Lakes freighters, which are 105 feet wide. (The lock is not named after Poe the poet, but for Col. Orlando Poe, a 19th-century officer in the Army Corps of Engineers.)

The new lock, which has yet to be named, will replace the two older locks. Construction should not disrupt traffic, according to the Corps of Engineers, since the Poe and MacArthur locks will remain open during the shipping season.

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